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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT MESIC KICKS UP DUST ON EUCOM MEMORANDUM
OF UNDERSTANDING

Classified By: Poloff Justin Friedman, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[11](#). (C) President Mesic has kicked up some political dust over the EUCOM Memorandum of Understanding (signed in July) on using Croatian facilities and airspace for bilateral military exercises. Without objecting to the substance of the MoU, Mesic's office has asserted publicly that it was not informed about the MoU until it came up for Sabor ratification late last week. Our understanding is that lead negotiator Assistant Minister of Defense for Policy Jelena Grcic-Polic was keeping Mesic's office in the loop. However, it is possible that in the finalization of the MoU text, the internal clearance process inside the GoC may have fallen short of the spirit, if not necessarily the letter of the regulations. Mesic may be trying to use the uproar to throw some dirt on the ruling HDZ party and, indirectly, on HDZ Presidential candidate Jadranka Kosor. Parliamentary ratification of the standard agreement is not seriously in doubt. END SUMMARY and COMMENT.

NOT IN THE LOOP?

[12](#). (SBU) President Mesic's office touched off a small political dust storm with the public assertion over the weekend that his office was not consulted before the Ministry of Defense signed a Memorandum of Understanding with EUCOM over the use of Croatian facilities and airspace for military exercises. On national television news on November 16, Mesic positioned himself above the fray, saying that he would have his staff review the MoU and the process leading up to its signing, but would not interfere in the Parliamentary ratification process if legal procedures had been followed.

[13](#). (C) Assistant Military Advisor to President Mesic, Maj. Robert Baric, confirmed for us the press reports that the President's office believes it was not fully consulted in the run up to the MoU signing.

WHO IS THE TARGET?

[14](#). (C) Press reports have focused on the fact that the MoU was signed by Grcic-Polic. Although Grcic-Polic was a key MoD office official in the previous coalition government, she is one of the few senior officials to stay in government when the HDZ assumed power last winter and may be perceived as too pro-U.S. Our experience with Grcic-Polic is that she is a tough negotiator and an effective, if prickly advocate for Croatian interests. We have heard rumors of Grcic-Polic's departure from the MoD since this summer when she was short-listed to be Croatia's Ambassador to Brussels. However, President Mesic appeared to have nixed her nomination. In the end, Grcic-Polic may be just collateral damage as she is seen as close to Foreign Minister Miomir Zuzul, in part from her previous diplomatic service.

[15](#). (C) Mesic's real target may be the HDZ and its presidential candidate, Jadranka Kosor. Some press commentators have picked up on this tiff as further evidence that the HDZ is too eager to kowtow to the U.S. as compensation for not delivering on pre-election promises of sending troops to Iraq or an Article 98 agreement. In the last week, Mesic has dropped his non-party, president-of-the-people stance and aligned himself with the SDP, HSS, and LIBRA opposition parties, as well as with his own former party, the HNS. Mesic is still polling above 50% with Kosor trailing far behind in second place with just 20% support.

RATIFICATION STILL SEEMS LIKELY

[16](#). (C) On substance, the MoU is a standard, non-controversial document. In a press conference November

16, former Defense Minister and opposition MP Zelka Antunovic only questioned the fact that the MoU had not been made public although it is not confidential. Pointedly, Antunovic did not challenge the substance or need for the MoU. This current dust up may slow ratification of the MoU, but MoD sources indicate ratification is not in jeopardy.
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